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**EUROPE IN THE MIRROR OF RUSSIA:
HOW INTERWAR TRAVELS TO THE SOVIET UNION RESHAPED EUROPEAN
PERCEPTIONS OF BORDERS, TIME AND HISTORY**

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Studies of interwar travels from Europe to Russia tend to prioritise reactions to the Soviet Union. This article, in contrast, examines how travellers reflected on Europe in the mirror of Russia, and focuses on the little-studied writing and reception of narratives by Andrée Viollis, Luc Durtain, Georges Duhamel and Alfred Fabre-Luce in the late 1920s. Through a comparative analysis shaped by recent histories of temporality, the article explores how encounters between Europe and Russia challenged assumptions on borders, time and history. Although Europeans are generally associated with a model of linear, evolutionary time, this case study reveals their engagement with competing models of time as linear, cyclical and salvational.

On 29 December 1927, a dense and heavily policed crowd packed the Parisian Cinéma de Grenelle for an emotional journey through time and space. This ‘great popular meeting’, intricately scripted by the committee commemorating the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, provided an immersive, audio-visual experience of the new regime, before inaugurating the French section of the Friends of the Soviet Union. Silent footage of Russia in 1917, a live orchestra, a phonograph playing Lenin’s speeches and – at the visual and symbolic centre of the stage – a series of witnesses recounting their recent journeys through the Soviet Union, flanked by French workers wearing the uniform of the Red Army.

‘Socialists, anarchists, communists, non-affiliated workers and intellectuals [...] have experienced Red Russia in every sense,’ proclaimed the posters, ‘and these delegates will travel everywhere to tell French workers what they have seen.’¹ The liturgical and religious dimensions of the event were entirely deliberate: the podium as altar, around which witnesses to the new faith were gathered both to commemorate and to proselytise; the special focus on non-communists (even former anarchists) ‘converted’ by their journeys. Writers who had visited Russia in 1927 celebrated its significance at the subsequent banquet, with French authors Luc Durtain and Andrée Viollis praising ‘a new civilisation on the march, and a new faith’, as well as the desire ‘to live nowhere if not over there’. While the sights and sounds of the spectacle seemed to resurrect October 1917, the hope of the proselytes was that this past and present would also be the future of Europe.²

Perceptions of Russia were inseparable from European self-perception. Exactly what the achievements and ambitions of Soviet Russia might signify for Europe – for its social and political development, its borders and global power – was a subject for intense debate, not least at this moment of introspection in 1927. A decade after the October Revolution, Russia could be presented as a template for European political and economic development, a case study in the challenges attending the practice of socialism (especially during the New Economic Policy of 1921–8), or an ominous return to a more primitive past. Europeans

¹ ‘Comité du Xe anniversaire de la Révolution Russe’ (poster), 1927, Archives nationales de France, Pierrefitte (hereafter AN), F7 13112, dossier 2, A100. The honorary presidents of the Société des Amis de l’Union Soviétique were Henri Barbusse (already renowned for his travels to the Soviet Union), Francis Jourdain and Panaït Istrati. This event is mentioned as a ‘grand messe’ – but not described – in Rachel Mazuy, *Croire plutôt que voir? Voyages en Russie soviétique (1919–39)* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2002), 99.

² See AN F7 13109, dossier 1; ‘Pour la Défense de l’état ouvrier’, *L’Humanité*, 30 Dec. 1927. Cf. Sophie Cœuré and Rachel Mazuy, eds., *Cousu de Fil rouge: voyages des intellectuels français en Union soviétique: 150 documents inédits des Archives russes* (Paris: CNRS, 2012), 297–8.

reflecting on Russian influence simultaneously looked outwards — to the ways in which Soviet policies might reshape the boundaries and balance of power between East and West, Europe and its colonies — and inwards, to personal worldviews and values. Those who travelled from Europe to Russia in this period thus found themselves confronting the question ‘Who am I?’,³ challenged to articulate and even rethink their own concepts and assumptions. Georges Duhamel, a French doctor and writer who journeyed to Russia with his friend Luc Durtain in 1927, confessed that he had ‘never felt more Western than when over there’,⁴ while writer and diplomat Alfred Fabre-Luce described his journey to Russia in the same year as ‘an attempt to gain, through the act of distancing and returning, a closer grasp of my more familiar univers’.⁵ Readers and reviewers meanwhile found in these accounts similar cause to evaluate how contemporary Russia was reshaping individual and European self-perception. As Eugène Marsan asserted in 1928, collectively reviewing travel narratives by Durtain, Viollis, Duhamel and Fabre-Luce, ‘I am as you are, readers: I need to know what effect Russia has had on them, as well as what it has become after ten years.’⁶

Despite the breadth of scholarship on interwar travels to Russia, historians continue to focus on how these travellers depicted Russia, not on how their journeys reshaped ideas of Europe. Most studies prioritise how far Western travellers were ‘convinced’ by the Soviet regime, with its carefully chosen guides and itineraries. Historians chart the ‘techniques of

³ François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time* [2003] (Colombia University Press, 2015), translated by Saskia Brown, 70.

⁴ Georges Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1928), 186.

⁵ Alfred Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1927), 261.

⁶ Eugène Marsan, ‘Des Idées et des livres: les nouveaux voyages en Russie’, *Comœdia*, 1 May 1928.

hospitality’ employed by Soviet officials to impress their visitors:⁷ the elaborate construction of what François Hourmant has described as a ‘parallel universe ... characterised by the omnipresence of simulacrum’.⁸ Equally, there remains an abiding interest in political pilgrimages by Western intellectuals converted by their Soviet experiences, even to the point of remaining ‘surprising indulgent’ about authoritarian practices elsewhere.⁹ Significantly, recent scholarship has begun to shift beyond these binary reactions to the Soviet Union, aiming instead to situate visions of Russia within longer-term cultural exchange,¹⁰ or to explore the ‘grey zone’ inhabited by the guides who were both mouthpieces and suspects of the Soviet regime.¹¹ But there remains an implicit conviction that European travels to Russia tell us about Russia, not Europe. What is more, the reception of interwar travel narratives about Russia has never been explored in detail. In fact, Sophie Cœuré – whose own research

⁷ Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims. Western Intellectuals in Search of the Good Society* (London and New Brunswick: Transaction, 1998), 6. These ‘techniques of hospitality’ are illuminatingly documented in Sophie Cœuré and Rachel Mazuy, eds., *Cousu de Fil rouge*. Other valuable studies of travel writings include Ludmilla Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920–40: From Red Square to the Left Bank* (London: Routledge, 2009), and Fred Kupferman, *Au Pays des soviets. Le voyage français en Russie soviétique* [1979] (Paris: Tallandier 2007).

⁸ François Hourmant, ‘La Croisière rouge, entre simulacre et théâtrocratie. Le système des privilèges des voyageurs aux pays de l’Avenir Radieux’, *Revue historique*, 302, 1 (2000), 121–56 (especially 122).

⁹ Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, 3; Martyn Cornick, Martin Hurcombe and Angela Kershaw, *French Political Travel Writing in the Interwar Years: Radical Departures* (London: Routledge, 2017).

¹⁰ Sophie Cœuré, *La Grande Lueur à l’Est: les Français et l’Union Soviétique, 1917–39* [1999] (Paris: CNRS, 2017), especially i and viii.

¹¹ Necessary to the state apparatus for their knowledge of foreign languages, the guides were at the same time potentially suspect of harbouring ‘Western’ sympathies – and in some cases later exiled. See Cœuré and Mazuy, eds., *Cousu de Fil rouge*, 11.

on European travels to Russia is invaluable – notes simply that it would be ‘difficult to assess’ the impact of such accounts in the late 1920s.¹²

This article, in contrast, makes the perception of Europe in the mirror of Russia its principal focus. It foregrounds four French travel narratives inspired by journeys to Russia in 1927 that have received little previous attention: *Seule en Russie* by Andrée Viollis (Françoise-Caroline Claudius Jacquet de la Veyrière), a feminist reporter for *Le Petit Parisien* who travelled out to Russia in late 1926;¹³ *Le Voyage de Moscou* and *L’Autre Europe: Moscou et sa foi* by Georges Duhamel and Luc Durtain (André Nepveu), left-wing doctors, writers, and contributors to *Europe, revue mensuelle* who journeyed together in the summer of 1927 at the invitation of the Soviet Academy of Sciences;¹⁴ and *Russie 1927* by the conservative Alfred Fabre-Luce, whose journey overlapped with that of the two doctors

¹² Cœuré, *La Grande Lueur*, 124. She does, however, describe the channels by which these accounts were usually disseminated: initial presentation of short extracts in a newspaper or review, publication of the complete work, lectures and meetings, and private interactions that are now impossible to recover.

¹³ Andrée Viollis, *Seule en Russie: de la Baltique à la Caspienne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1927). The accounts were first published in *Le Petit Parisien* between 16 Jan. and 16 Apr. 1927. Viollis had contributed to Marguerite Durand’s feminist newspaper *La Fronde* before becoming a war correspondent and later reporter for *Le Petit Parisien*, a newspaper for which she prepared *grands reportages* from Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Portugal and Ireland. On Viollis’s development of a self-consciously ‘objective’ journalistic style, see Frank Harbers and Marcel Broers, ‘Impartial Reporter or Écrivain Engagé? Andrée Viollis and the Transformation of French Journalism, 1918–40’, *French History*, 30, 2 (2016), 218–40.

¹⁴ Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*; Luc Durtain, *L’Autre Europe: Moscou et sa Foi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1928). Both Durtain and Duhamel had also invited Olga Davidovna Kameneva, president of VOKS, to Paris in the same year, and Durtain would later become a fellow-traveller of the French Communist Party (Parti Communiste Français) and return to Russia in 1935, breaking with these sympathies only after the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939 (see Cœuré and Mazuy, *Cousu de Fil rouge*, 117). On longer-term scientific collaboration, see Rachel Mazuy, ‘La Décade franco-soviétique de 1934’, *Cahiers du monde russe*, 43, 2–3 (2002), 441–8.

but who published his account in explicit opposition to Duhamel.¹⁵ Though now little known,¹⁶ all four accounts were widely discussed and compared by contemporaries — in French political and intellectual circles, in the wider press, and even in trade-union evening classes¹⁷ — although this reception has been similarly neglected.

The central contention here is that these travel narratives concern Europe as well as Russia, and that they reveal some of the most significant ways in which Russia was reshaping European notions of borders, measurability, time and history in the interwar period. The first section demonstrates how discussions of Russian and European development were closely interlinked, often involving the same historical actors (including the writers under discussion), and how travel narratives could deliberately counter the rigidity of borders between Russia and Europe. In the second and third sections, departing significantly from existing scholarship, the article reveals that some of the deepest delineations identified between Russia and Europe were not geographical or even political, but scientific and temporal. The second section explores perceived differences between the measurement,

¹⁵ Fabre-Luce, the son and grandson of a banker, was a self-assured capitalist and a future collaborator (he would, in 1942, publish an *Anthologie de la nouvelle Europe*). He travelled with a diplomatic passport and with his friend André Beucler, and was well-known to be unsympathetic to the regime. On Fabre-Luce's political and economic thought, see Daniel Knecht, *Fascism, Liberalism and Europeanism in the Political Thought of Bertrand de Jouvenel and Alfred Fabre-Luce* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

¹⁶ Sophie Cœuré and Rachel Mazuy include Viollis on their list of lesser-known French travellers in *Cousu de Fil rouge*, 20. Duhamel, Durtain and Fabre-Luce are not featured here, although Cœuré refers separately to their accounts in *La Grande Lueur* (e.g. 61–8). She does not, however, consider their discussion of Europe and its borders. Martyn Cornick likewise refers to Duhamel and Fabre-Luce as minor characters in *Intellectuals in History: The NRF under Jean Paulhan* (Brill: Rodopi, 1995), Chapter Five.

¹⁷ On the later inclusion of the narratives by Durtain, Fabre-Luce and Viollis in workers' adult education, see 'L'Éducation ouvrière. Le programme du cercle d'études de l'U.D. du Rhône', *Le Peuple*, 7 Aug. 1932.

calibration and experience of time and space in Europe and Russia. The third section probes the previously uncharted critical reception of these travel narratives, and examines how perceived temporal distinctions between Europe and Russia challenged Europeans in their imagination of the shape and direction of historical development. Contributing to the ‘temporal turn’ in contemporary historiography,¹⁸ this analysis suggests that the experience of Russia as both past and future caused writers and readers to question their assumptions about the linear, evolutionary model of time – a model still widely portrayed as integral to European modes of thought. Cumulatively, this article reveals how Russia reshaped European perceptions of both time and history, developing our understanding of the cultural imagination of the interwar period.

RUSSIA: THE ‘OTHER EUROPE’?

The four French writers in this case study were obviously shaped by the specificity of Franco–Russian exchange.¹⁹ Nevertheless, they also operated within political tourism and discussion on a European scale and with a European focus. French political militants, workers’ delegates, writers, journalists (and even children) who travelled to Russia in the

¹⁸ Donna R. Gabaccia, ‘Is is about Time?’, *Social Science History*, 34, 1 (2010), 1–12.

¹⁹ French visitors found the Commune of 1871 on school syllabi, and were drawn into conversation about French revolutions, past and present: they knew that Russians of a certain age and social standing would be likely to speak French. There was, meanwhile, a lively Russian interest in the works of writers such as André Gide, Marcel Proust and Georges Duhamel, and even the right-wing author Clément Vautel, whose *Je suis un affreux bourgeois* was deemed to be ‘excellent anti-capitalist propaganda.’ Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*, 146.

mid-1920s joined a small but steady stream of other foreign visitors,²⁰ which in the French case peaked after the Soviet Union's diplomatic recognition by Édouard Herriot's left-wing government in October 1924.²¹ Like other foreign visitors, they were – as voluminous archives attest²² – meticulously supervised during their Russian journeys, their trajectories often carefully curated by VOKS (the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations established in September 1923), or, from 1929, by Intourist.²³ Those attending the inaugural conference of the Friends of the Soviet Union in 1927 found themselves among 947 delegates from forty-three countries;²⁴ many would then shape the creation of the Society's national sections, as at the Parisian Cinéma de Grenelle in December. Returning home, delegates were provided with

²⁰ 'Quatre enfants, fils de travailleurs, sont partis visiter la Russie rouge' (flyer), AN F7 13186, dossier 2. Child-centred propaganda specifically encouraged games of 'Red Army versus White Army' and offered simplified lectures on the revolutionary situation in China. See *Le Dirigeant. Bulletin à l'usage des dirigeants du mouvement communiste d'enfants*, AN F7 13186, dossier 2 (*Préfecture de Vauchuse*, septembre 1927).

²¹ Approximately sixty French people travelled to the Soviet Union each year in the mid-1920s. See Mazuy, *Croire plutôt que voir*, 32 and Cœuré, *La Grande Lueur*, 64. Diplomatic relations declined later in the decade, and by 1927 Herriot's left-wing Cartel des Gauches had been replaced by a right-wing government under Raymond Poincaré.

²² A selection is reproduced in Cœuré and Mazuy, eds., *Cousu de Fil rouge*.

²³ On Bolshevik cultural diplomacy in the 1920s, see Ewa Berard, 'The "First Exhibition of Russian Art in Berlin": The Transnational Origins of Bolshevik Cultural Diplomacy, 1921–22', *Contemporary European History*, 30, 2 (2021), 164–80; Jean-François Fayet, 'VOKS. The Third dimension of Soviet Foreign Policy' in Jessica Gienow-Hecht and Marc Donfried, eds., *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2010), 33–49 and Cœuré and Mazuy, eds., *Cousu de fil rouge*, especially 15–16.

²⁴ Fayet, 'VOKS', 42.

extensive documentation in their own languages, explicitly to assist with oral or written accounts of their Soviet visit.²⁵

By the time Viollis, Durtain, Duhamel and Fabre-Luce journeyed to the Soviet Union in 1926–7, the travel writing to which they contributed was marked by its own salient characteristics – and long before André Gide’s *Retour de l’URSS* of 1936 became a notorious classic in the genre.²⁶ These writers shared in the itineraries of their predecessors (there was, for example, an established circuit that included Leningrad, Moscow, Kiev, Odessa and Sebastopol), and they visited the same schools and factories, despite the illusion of choice.²⁷ They also played to the generic conventions of the genre by discussing an expected array of topics, including the NEP, censorship, violence and surveillance, the cult of Lenin, art and culture, the supply of food, relations between the sexes, family policies and the problem of street children. Sometimes they paid explicit homage to earlier travel writing, whether this writing described Russia or charted other ‘new worlds’. When Fabre-Luce travelled down the

²⁵ See, for example, advertisements in the French Communist daily newspaper *L’Humanité* for accounts of Soviet Russia by L. Schumacher, both in meetings (‘Ceux qui ont vu, témoignent’, 24 Dec. 1927) and in publications (‘*Un Monde nouveau*, par L. Schumacher’, 10 Sept. 1928). The French Communist Party also organised speaker-meetings with delegates who had attended the commemorations, as well as with Jeanne Bullant, who had spent three years in the Soviet Union. See ‘Comité central mixte pour l’envoi en URSS d’une délégation de jeunes travailleurs français’, 1927, AN F7 13183; ‘La Vérité sur la Russie’, AN F7 13190, A331 and AN F7 13147, dossier 1. Approximate numbers of those attending these meetings in major cities such as Lyon and Saint-Étienne were given in *L’Humanité* on 26 Jan. 1928.

²⁶ Gide had conceived his enthusiasm for the Soviet Union after reading Michael Farbmman’s contribution to *Europe, revue mensuelle* on the five-year plan in 1931, and confided to his diary that he now wanted ‘to live long enough to see this enormous effort succeed’. See Cornick, *Intellectuals in History: The NRF*, 133.

²⁷ French visitors, including Édouard Herriot and Andrée Viollis, were often shown the same textile factory Trechgoraya. Mazuy, *Croire plutôt que voir*, 99 and 101; Cœuré, *La Grande Lueur*, 65.

Volga, for instance, he sought out the landscapes and peoples depicted by artist Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin in the eighteenth century, and, more recently, by the poet and novelist Théophile Gautier and the nationalist writer and deputy Maurice Barrès.²⁸ Durtain and Viollis compared their sense of estrangement with that of the protagonist in *Gulliver's Travels*,²⁹ while Durtain's and Duhamel's accounts played with the strangeness of travelling to a 'new world' without crossing the sea, while at the same time preserving maritime imagery by describing the train (and indeed Russia itself) as a ship.³⁰

While participating in wider patterns of political tourism, these writers were also actively involved in discussions on Europe as continent and idea, even potential federation.³¹ Paris in 1927 witnessed not only discussions and commemorations of Russia in 1917, but equally a series of European-focused meetings and debates. In May the French hosted the central committee of the Paneuropean Union, which discussed a possible European federation, customs union and common currency.³² The French national section included writers and political activists who had already travelled – or would shortly travel – to the Soviet Union, among them Alfred Fabre-Luce, former Prime Minister Édouard Herriot and

²⁸ Fabre-Luce references Chardin on page 229 of *Russie 1927*, Gautier on 192 and Barrès several times, including 231.

²⁹ See Durtain, *L'Autre Europe*, 55 and Viollis, 71.

³⁰ See Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*, 26 and Durtain, *L'Autre Europe*, 17 and 32.

³¹ On idea of Europe in this period, see Christian Bailey, Ruth Leiserowitz and Jessica Wardhaugh, 'Intellectual Dissidents and the Construction of European Spaces, 1918–1988' in Kiran Patel and Martin Conway, eds., *Europeanization in the Twentieth Century: Historical Approaches* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 21–43.

³² The Union had been founded in 1922 by Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, who published *Pan-Europa* in 1923 and an eponymous magazine in 1924. See Dusan Sidjanski, *The Federal Future of Europe. From the European Community to the European Union* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 9.

economist Charles Rist.³³ Viollis, Duhamel and Durtain were similarly active in European debates. Andrée Viollis was already well-known for her reports on Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Portugal and Ireland as journalist for *Le Petit Parisien*, and fascinated by the relationship between Europe and the East.³⁴ Both Georges Duhamel and Luc Durtain contributed to *Europe, revue mensuelle*, which from 1923 onwards included reflections on Europe as a common ‘fatherland’ and even ‘supreme state’;³⁵ and Durtain would publish extracts from his study of Russia in both *Europe, revue mensuelle* and *Europe nouvelle* before the book-length version appeared in 1928.³⁶ The critical interest was, moreover, reciprocated. Soviet authorities acquired *Europe, revue mensuelle* until 1930, alongside prominent travel narratives such as Andrée Viollis’s *Seule en Russie*.³⁷ Meanwhile, the theme

³³ Mikhail Narinski, Elisabeth du Réau, Georges-Henri Soutou and Alexandre Tchoubarian, eds., *L’URSS et l’Europe dans les années 1920* (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2000), 57. 1926 also witnessed the conclusion of the Nouvelles amitiés franco-russes, established in Paris in 1924 with the help of Édouard Herriot as part of a Moscow-based initiative to secure sympathy and diplomatic recognition for the new regime from non-communists. Cœuré, *La Grande Lueur*, 86.

³⁴ Viollis’s fascination with the ‘oriental’ dimension of the Soviet Union would prompt her swift re-application to enter the country, as documented in the Soviet archives, to study ‘social and cultural life in Soviet Asia.’ See Cœuré and Mazuy, eds., *Cousu de Fil rouge*, 92. On Viollis’s accounts of French Indochina, which she visited in 1931, see Kershaw, ‘The New Soviet Woman’ in Cornick, Hurcombe, and Kershaw, *Radical Departures*, 117–129.

³⁵ René Arcos, ‘Patrie européenne’, *Europe, revue mensuelle*, 15 February 1923; Heinrich Mann, ‘L’Europe, état suprême’, *Europe, revue mensuelle*, 15 July 1923.

³⁶ See *L’Europe Nouvelle*, 509 (12 Nov. 1927), and *Europe, revue mensuelle*, 15: 58–50 (15 Oct., 15 Nov., and 15 Dec. 1927), and 61 (15 Jan. 1928); Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*.

³⁷ The archives of the Soviet Foreign Commission also include correspondence with the editors of *Europe, revue mensuelle*. Stern, *Western Intellectuals*, 104, 143 and 164.

of Pan-Europe was a near-constant preoccupation in *Izvestia*, official national newspaper of the Soviet government, between late 1929 and summer 1931.³⁸

Shaped by these entangled discussions on Russia and Europe, Duhamel, Durtain, Viollis and Fabre-Luce used their travel narratives not so much to confirm as to counter some of the expected distinctions between the two. In particular, they were anxious to explore Russia's complex, symbiotic relationship with Europe, rather than simply to validate the binary reactions towards Russia as the Soviet Union that have continued to take precedence in research. Viollis, for example, played to the expectation of binary reactions by insisting that she had not been entirely 'convinced', yet at the same time styled her account as 'neither apology nor condemnation'.³⁹ Durtain, similarly, articulated and then immediately refuted the reader's presumed desire for a one-word answer on Russia, opening his account with the rhetorical question, 'What are my impressions from the visit?' 'Well', he then answered, 'it's that everything one could say about the USSR is true! Everything – and also the exact opposite!'⁴⁰ Equally prominent in the texts were references to the multitude of misleading images of Russia in circulation, which, as Fabre-Luce suggested, were causing 'this great

³⁸ Narinski et al., eds., *L'URSS et l'Europe*, 144.

³⁹ Viollis, *Seule en Russie*, 9.

⁴⁰ Durtain, *L'Autre Europe*, 'Au Lecteur', 7. Cf. 'A partisan traveller ... can utter outrageous falsehoods while giving only the facts.' (*L'Autre Europe*, 121). Similarly, Duhamel cautioned the reader that one should not be too swift to 'judge Slavic people with our Western hearts' (*Le Voyage de Moscou*, 210). The writers distinguished between 'Western' (i.e. European) and US reactions – see, for example, Durtain, *L'Autre Europe*, 147.

country edging away from Europe’ to become an island, surrounded by ‘a double and distorting mirror of fake news.’⁴¹

Like many of their contemporaries, these writers paid close attention to the act of crossing the border. Yet as their narratives unfolded, all four writers also explored ways in which the boundaries between Europe and Russia – seemingly so clear-cut at the moment of transition – were in fact more challenging and perhaps surprising to discern, not least because ‘Russia’ and the ‘Soviet Union’ were far from interchangeable. As Rachel Mazuy emphasises, travellers to Russia were acutely conscious of entering both a political and a geographical space. More than that, the most significant border, in the words of the communist Paul Vaillant-Couturier, was that of class.⁴² Durtain and Duhamel were thus disappointed that darkness and snow obscured the banner exhorting workers of the world to unite; Andrée Viollis was similarly irked to cross the border in darkness, so missing the ‘theatrical’ welcome accorded to Western workers (‘how many times had I dreamed of that first contact!’).⁴³ Fabre-Luce, meanwhile, described the intense sensation of having crossed ‘the furthest shoreline of capitalism’. For him, this was a liminal moment ‘more emotive than the geographical boundaries dreamed of by Barrès or Chateaubriand’, a ‘crossing of the moral tropics’ that should be marked with its own ‘baptism’ in the manner of crossing the Tropic of Cancer or the equator.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 171. Durtain likewise chastised his readers for accepting ‘monochrome’ images of Russia that circulated in Europe, especially if they had already encountered its richness and diversity through Dostoyevsky or Turgenev. *L’Autre Europe*, 8.

⁴² Cœuré, *La Grande Lueur*, 90.

⁴³ Viollis, *Seule en Russie*, 19.

⁴⁴ Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 22.

Similarly, all four writers experienced in Soviet maps a disorientating reshaping of both space and narrative, and acknowledged of the power of cartography to reconfigure global politics as well as geography.⁴⁵ Durtain was surprised by the portraits of so many philosophers in the customs shed (even the ‘heretical’ Trotsky), and noticed that in the selection of maps, the map of the world was already ‘riddled with red marks’.⁴⁶ Fabre-Luce, during his meeting with the Director of Foreign Policy Georgy Tchitcherin, noticed the deliberate centrality on the map of the ‘expanding USSR, while the capitalist countries, drawn away by the rotundity of the globe, sidle discreetly to the edges’: a symbolic change of perspective, even if not necessarily a distortion of the material relationships of size and space between Russia and Europe.⁴⁷ Durtain’s conclusions were similar. A map in a Russian schoolroom forced his acknowledgement that the ‘immense USSR balances out – indeed, that’s exactly the case – a handful of other countries.’⁴⁸ And while Viollis saw the Soviet map as anticipating conflict over Asia between the ‘Russian bear’ and the ‘British leopard’, and recorded Tchitcherin’s musings over ‘Moscow, capital of the United States of Asia’,⁴⁹ Duhamel reached comparable conclusions, on the assumption that revolution in China would be diverted from purely nationalist ends. ‘Then’, he wrote, ‘Europe would be compressed into the very corner of a communist continent, reduced to a few nations divided by inexpiable hatreds, under the impassive and suspicious gaze of the great American republics’.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ ‘Cartographers manufacture power: they create a spatial panopticon.’ J. B. Harley, ‘Deconstructing the Map’, in John Agnew, David Livingstone and Alisdair Rogers, eds., *Human Geography: An Essential Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 439.

⁴⁶ Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*, 22.

⁴⁷ Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 57.

⁴⁸ Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*, 134.

⁴⁹ Viollis, *Seule en Russie*, 69.

⁵⁰ Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*, 254–5.

Despite their interest in the moment of border-crossing, however, and despite the mental gymnastics required to adjust to Soviet cartography, all four writers were nonetheless determined to emphasise the more fluid and elusive character of borders between Russia and Europe. As the train travelled through Lithuania and Latvia, before the ‘official’ border, Alfred Fabre-Luce found himself already seeking Russia in these ‘elements detached from Russian territory during the great reshaping of 1918.’⁵¹ Meanwhile, Georges Duhamel questioned how much of Russia’s complex history, geographical diversity, or 150 million inhabitants could effectively be conveyed by a political regime deriving from a revolution only ten years previously,⁵² and therefore insisted that ‘Russia’ and the ‘USSR’ were far from interchangeable.⁵³ ‘Who would think of saying, “I’m going to spend my holidays in federal Switzerland”’, he added, ‘or “I’ve got several clients in monarchical England”?’⁵⁴ Similarly, his companion Luc Durtain despaired of attaching any uniform character to a country ‘placed at the crossroads between Asia and Europe, with its extraordinary diversity of races.’⁵⁵ Reviews in the literary rather than political press, such as *Le Monde slave, revue mensuelle*,

⁵¹ Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 17. Here, the impressions of Durtain, Fabre-Luce and Viollis nuance the claims made, for example, by Rachel Mazuy, that writers and journalists usually began their narratives after crossing the border, or that the relative speed of railway journeys necessarily displaced the travel narrative from journey to destination. See Mazuy, *Croire plutôt que voir*, 63 and Paula Henrikson and Christina Kulberg, eds., *Time and temporality in European Travel Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2021), Introduction, 5 and 7.

⁵² Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*, 20–1.

⁵³ Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*, 22. Russia is nonetheless “‘diverse and undulating”, just like the humanity described by our own Montaigne.’ (‘Certes, c’est un sujet merveilleusement vain, divers et ondoyant que l’homme.’ Montaigne, *Essais* [1580], Book 1, Chapter 1).

⁵⁴ Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*, 19 (see also 11).

⁵⁵ Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*, ‘Au Lecteur’.

welcomed this recognition that Russia, its people, and its revolutions could not be smoothly conflated and then superficially dismissed in an initial reaction to ‘Soviet’ Russia.⁵⁶

Playing with their own – and their readers’ – expectations, these writers also highlighted moments of missed exoticism: moments of unexpected similarity or ‘Europeanness’ in a country more frequently associated with ‘radical alterity’.⁵⁷ Georges Duhamel found to his surprise that the Sunday market in Moscow’s Smolensky Square suggested ‘both Asia and Europe, the Orient and the Rue Mouffetard [in Paris]’.⁵⁸ Similarly, Andrée Viollis’s internalised images and expectations of exoticism and orientalism were abruptly challenged by her experience of Nizhny Novgorod, 250 miles east of Moscow. This populous and commercial centre, spanning the Volga and Oka rivers and famous for its wood-crafted nineteenth-century merchants’ estates as well as for the all-Russia Exhibition held there in 1896, was still an important centre for trade in the late 1920s. Yet ‘where are the precious stones’, Viollis lamented, ‘the sable, the Persian silks, the fabrics from Smyrna and the cashmere from India, the exquisite firearms from Tiflis, and the Caucasian and Turkish rugs? Are we really in Nizhny Novgorod, or are we actually at a fair in Lyon or Paris?’ Still more disappointing was her glimpse of a delegate from the southern Russian Republic of Kyrgyz. Inspired, perhaps, by images of turbans as emblems of the exotic,⁵⁹ she had imagined him robed in scarlet, ‘a turban resting on his forehead, on its crest a fountain sprinkled with pearls, and fixed with a gemstone’. Instead, he was swathed only in an

⁵⁶ F. Dominois, ‘Cinq Études françaises sur la Russie’, *Le Monde slave: revue mensuelle* (1 Jan. 1928), 143.

⁵⁷ Cf. ‘Russia seemed very distant from France, and was generally considered as Asiatic rather than European.’ Cornick, *Intellectuals in History*, 123.

⁵⁸ Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*. 156.

⁵⁹ See Adam Geczy, *Fashion and Orientalism. Dress, Textiles and Culture from the Seventeenth to the Twenty-First Century* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), especially 76–7.

ordinary scarf, and wearing an equally nondescript cap and overcoat. He could have been a merchant from Normandy, or the Auvergne. He was not even escorted by a romantic caravan of camels – having arrived, pragmatically, by plane.⁶⁰ Certainly, she conceded, the fair at Nizhny Novgorod was still more Asian than European. Yet it exemplified for her a new Asia, ‘racing towards mechanisation, using the telephone, the aeroplane and the radio’, and seemingly losing its own soul under its increasingly European guise.⁶¹ Nor were such frustrated expectations to be found only among Europeans. When Alfred Fabre-Luce travelled south to Tiflis (in present-day Georgia), he found himself the object of heightened curiosity among the local population. Pressing their excited faces against the windows of the carriages, they tried to catch a glimpse of the foreign travellers, but were disappointed to find that he, like Rica in Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes*, had divested himself of immediate interest and exoticism by donning local costume.⁶²

If Russia lacked exoticism, it also challenged the specificity and presumed superiority of European culture. In the basement of the Hermitage, Luc Durtain mused over the fragments of Graeco-Scythian art, with their suggestion that Hellenic culture – so integral to European self-perception – had been ‘one of the earliest deposits of alluvium to enrich the Russian soil, if not the earliest’.⁶³ More broadly, his study of architecture and the human

⁶⁰ Viollis, *Seule en Russie*, 79.

⁶¹ Viollis, *Seule en Russie*, 80. This theme of Europeanised Asia would be similarly explored by Carlo Sforza in the pages of *Europe, revue mensuelle*. See ‘L’Avenir de l’Europe’, 15 Jan. 1937.

⁶² ‘None of them has ever seen a Frenchman. They want to know how they look and what they wear. With my Russian shirt, I’m rather a disappointment ...’ Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 221. Cf. Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes* [1721] (Paris, 1828), 73: ‘I had reason to complain to my tailor, who had caused me to lose in an instant all public attention and esteem ...’

⁶³ Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*, 113. Viollis found aspects of Moscow reminiscent of ‘all civilisations, and all continents: Athens, Byzantium, Versailles, Peking.’ *Seule en Russie*, 38.

scale in Moscow led, first, to reaffirmation, even self-congratulation, for the European and his characteristics. Yet the more frequently Durtain conducted his experiment, the less clear his conclusions became. Although often struck by a greater serenity, passivity, or resignation in Russian countenances than on the faces of anxious, chronometrically regulated Europeans, he also located the European ‘gaze’ – often now associated with imperial and gendered control – in Moscow.⁶⁴ And this posed a challenging problem. Was Russia, then, not also some kind of Europe? Durtain thus called upon the reader directly to rethink and resituate Moscow, and even Russia itself:

Not in Europe, as you have just observed. Not outside Europe, as you have previously acknowledged. This unique combination of daring novelty and archaic tradition, together with the geographical breadth and diversity of a country which, isolated from other civilisations by the curious chasm of its frontiers, numbers 150 million inhabitants and occupies a sixth of the earth’s land surface: does this not cumulatively legitimise, in terms of moral geography, the provisional recognition of a sixth continent? Just as we refer to North America and South America, could we not similarly refer to *Europe* and the *Other Europe*?⁶⁵

SYSTEMS OF MASTERY AND MEASUREMENT

While Russia could represent an ‘other Europe’, a mirror in which to seek alterity and find resemblance, this did not signify that the border between the two was an undifferentiated

⁶⁴ See, for example, Michael Meyer, ‘Word and Image – Gaze and Spectacle’ in Meyer, ed., *Word and Image in Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures and Cultures* (New York and Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), xvii–xliii.

⁶⁵ Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*, 55. Fabre-Luce also sought to distinguish between the European and Russian gaze, as between social conventions regarding the exchange and eschewal of gazes in urban spaces (21 and 25).

‘grey zone’ with no salient features at all. On the contrary, all four writers in this study were convinced of a profound difference between Russia and Europe, but not only or straightforwardly in the areas that other writers had described, such as economics, surveillance or censorship. Instead, one of the shared convictions of these writers — and one that has not previously been explored in detail — was that Russia and Europe inhabited different regimes of measurability, temporality and historicity. These perceived distinctions sometimes had the more straightforward effect of bolstering the Europeans’ own convictions, supporting theories that European travel in this period could ‘distract the European eye or even to allow it to rediscover and re-impose a Western supremacist vision.’⁶⁶ However, they also prompted the realisation that Russia’s elusive place within European concepts and experiences of time, speed, or human endeavour might require a rethinking of these frameworks themselves.

This sense of difference between Europe and Russia was prompted by changes observed in the character, usage and mastery of urban and rural space as western Europeans travelled eastwards. The more industrialised and populous areas of central and northern Europe were, as Viollis and Durtain noted, characterised by their ‘abundance of manmade achievements’,⁶⁷ with their transport networks, stations and canals seemingly as natural and ‘rooted’ in their landscapes as the trees. In contrast, the rarer glimpses of factories after the Russian border gave the impression of imported foreign ‘specimens’.⁶⁸ For Fabre-Luce, space appeared as ‘that great Slavic luxury’, while for Durtain the salient characteristic of ‘Slavic immensity’ was the relationship to ‘the Earth, still unconquered, with its elemental proportions [...] the miracle of unrealised consubstantiation’. And those who – unlike Durtain

⁶⁶ Cornick, Hurcombe and Kershaw, *Radical Departures*, Introduction, 2.

⁶⁷ Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*, 13; Viollis, *Seule en Russie*, 16.

⁶⁸ Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*, 33.

himself – could not compare their journey with the Sahara or the American Prairie, would doubtless experience the elemental shock still more intensely.⁶⁹

The sense of a shifting relationship between humans and their environment was also sharpened by the immediate context of the railway and its rolling stock. The change of rolling stock to match the gauge of the Russian railway seemed here symbolic as well as practical. Travellers from Paris to Moscow spent the first two days of their three-day journey in the same carriages, where the ‘magical mirrors seemed still, sometimes, to show us the veiled image of Paris’. On the third day, the Soviet sleeping cars were newer, massive, and garish: as Durtain put it, ‘what vast Russian governments are to French *départements*’.⁷⁰ Arriving in Moscow, these writers were similarly conscious of a shift in scale. Duhamel, for example, described the Palace that included the writers’ collective where they were hosted as ‘oversized: seemingly not on a human scale’.⁷¹ ‘Everything in Russia is adjusted to the gigantic stature of the Romanovs’, concluded Viollis, contemplating her ‘elephantine’ bath and comparing herself with Gulliver in the land of the giants.⁷² Certainly, western Europe was rich in architectural variation, as Durtain acknowledged, and the streets of London, Madrid, Stockholm, Berlin and Paris might seem at first glance to have little in common. Yet in the mirror of Russia, the cityscapes of ‘our great European country’ (and, strikingly, he used the singular here) seemed more closely based on ‘houses built on human proportions’ than their Russian counterparts. For Durtain, the European assumed the image of a ‘man with

⁶⁹ Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*, 17.

⁷⁰ Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*, 29–30.

⁷¹ Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*, 74.

⁷² Viollis, *Seule en Russie*, 71.

windows round his head, who has long known how to resolve, with a smile, problems of which so many other peoples are ignorant'.⁷³

It was not only matter but also movement that determined these perceptions of difference between Europe and Russia. Viollis, for one, was surprised that her train should arrive in Moscow at the advertised hour, because she assumed a lack of correlation between western and eastern timetables, despite a deliberate expansion of 'rational and efficient' time through the standardisation of times and schedules across national borders.⁷⁴ Durtain and Duhamel were struck by the change of speed when transferring rolling stock to match the Russian track gauge. The sudden slowing to no more than fifty kilometres an hour – just as the landscape was becoming simultaneously more open and less populated – conveyed a sense of qualitative as well as quantitative difference between European and Russia speed. Indeed, as Durtain questioned, what role could European speed, a 'quality that is so nervous, so tense', possibly play in the vastness of Russia?

What force could its bar of steel – an alloy of haste, willpower, and precision, embedded in our country in a well-defined world whose contours it deforms – exercise here, in these deserts where distance has recovered its original fluidity? In this slow peregrination, space and time are unbounded. Indeed, I no longer have the sensation of the ship's bow leaving the quay and setting off across the waves: instead I'm like a probe sinking into the ocean, descending towards the unknown.⁷⁵

⁷³ Durtain, *L'Autre Europe*, 41.

⁷⁴ Viollis, *Seule en Russie*, 24. On the standardisation project, see Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time*, especially 1–9.

⁷⁵ Durtain, *L'Autre Europe*, 32.

More profoundly, this formed part of a wider debate over the status and role of scientific endeavour in Russian and European society and politics. Durtain and Duhamel, doctors and writers invited to Russia in their professional capacities, focused this debate on scientific theory and practice, as well as on technological development. Unusually among European visitors, they were able to visit both hospitals and laboratories – including that of Pavlov, though he himself was absent at the time.⁷⁶ They were impressed that the state should devote significant financial resources to scientific research despite more pressing demands of modernisation, particularly electrification, and that leading scientists critical of the regime should be supported in their research, albeit under close supervision.⁷⁷ And yet despite this admiration, they also voiced their anxiety at the ‘austere cult of science’ in Russia, with its assumption that human behaviour could always be scientifically determined and predicted.⁷⁸ Durtain, for instance, found the ‘mixture of facts and arithmetic, authority and propaganda’ to be too ‘dry’, and was especially disconcerted when a Russian schoolchild asked him the time of the next French revolution, ‘just as a traveller would enquire at the ticket office what time a particular train would depart’.⁷⁹

Much of the debate over this supposed cultural difference between Russia and Europe could be interpreted as a certain self-satisfaction, even self-congratulation, on the part of the European visitors: an assumption that Europeans could master ‘precision tools’, whereas Russians were ill-equipped to do so.⁸⁰ Yet there was a simultaneous rethinking of Europe and

⁷⁶ Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*, 110.

⁷⁷ Durtain, *L'Autre Europe*, 125. The degree of supervision intensified considerably in the 1930s: see Alexander Vucinich, *Einstein and Soviet Ideology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

⁷⁸ Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*, 105.

⁷⁹ Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*, 245; Durtain, *L'Autre Europe*, 22 and 137.

⁸⁰ Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 166.

Europeans. Even Fabre-Luce, who was often derided in reviews for superciliousness, peering down on ordinary mortals through his monocle,⁸¹ acknowledged that these traits were no laughing matter. ‘You [Russians]’, he wrote, ‘make us realise our own misplaced idealism by exaggerating it to comical dimensions’. The fusion of science and emotion, class and nation, politics and religion and the search for happiness – ‘this curious compilation of contrasting conjectures may define the Russian Revolution, yet it also renders it movingly close to our own experience. It leaps into the abyss towards which we, too, seem to strain’.⁸²

Through these debates ran the anxiety that differences between scientific mastery and measurability in Europe and Russia challenged the systems of analysis that the travellers carried with them. Durtain, for instance, suggested that those encountering this ‘new civilisation’ should come ‘bearing measuring instruments under their arms’,⁸³ and yet at the same time found in Russia a country ‘where every human limit has disappeared’, and where ‘our very concepts of countries, and our ideas, seem too narrow’.⁸⁴ Fabre-Luce, endeavouring to situate the Russian economy in the era of the NEP, admitted that ‘it cannot be entirely defined by our own measuring instruments’.⁸⁵ ‘In its tragic experiment, it gathers up every one our cards and scrambles them completely, so that we start the round all over again’.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Altman, ‘Les Livres’.

⁸² Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 166. Viollis, too, recognised that the cult of science in Europe combined a fascination with power and a disregard for emotion (*Seule en Russie*, 17).

⁸³ Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*, 42.

⁸⁴ Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*, 30 and 32.

⁸⁵ Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 86.

⁸⁶ Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 171.

TIME AND HISTORY

The realm in which such incongruence was most salient – both for the travellers and for those who heard, read and reviewed their accounts – was that of time itself. Travel and travel-writing exist in a multifaceted relationship with time: there are the multiple times of the journey, its narrative and reception;⁸⁷ there is the relationship between the ‘individual’ time or *eigenzeitlichkeit* of the traveller (carried, like Durtain’s mental measuring instruments, ‘in one’s luggage’),⁸⁸ and the regimes of temporality of the peoples and countries encountered. More profoundly, there is the question of whether these regimes of temporality can coexist as separate realms or ‘pluritemporalities’,⁸⁹ or whether, despite their geographical variation, they represent stages in a single, teleological evolution.⁹⁰ As recent research has explored, the perception of time is closely influenced by chronopolitical control, and framed by what

⁸⁷ See, for example, Robert Clarke, ‘History, Memory and Trauma in Postcolonial Travel Writing’, *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Travel Writing* (Cambridge: CUP, 2018), 49.

⁸⁸ Ottmar Ette, *ReiseSchreiben: Potsdamer Vorlesungen zur Reiseliteratur* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 115.

⁸⁹ A.R.P. Fryxell describes ‘pluritemporality’ as ‘the entanglement between different kinds of time in modernity’, although with an emphasis on the opposition between social and individual, mechanical and subjective time rather than between linear and cyclical temporalities. See ‘Time and the Modern: Current Trends in the History of Temporalities’, *Past and Present* 243, 1 (2019), 293.

⁹⁰ Reinhard Koselleck described this the ‘simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous’, while Duhamel articulated a similar idea in his description of humanity as ‘so varied that it offers, at the same moment in time, images of an almost Palaeolithic past alongside vibrant images of the future.’ Reinhard Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History. Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 8, and Duhamel, *Scènes de la vie future* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1930), 17.

François Hartog has termed ‘regimes of historicity’: ‘ways of articulating the past, the present, and the future and investing them with sense’.⁹¹

Here, the writing and reception of the travel narratives in this study speak to a controversial theme: the impact on European perceptions of temporality and historicity of the countries to which they travelled. In their 2021 volume on European travel writing, Paula Henrikson and Christina Kulberg note that Europeans have often been accused of ‘imposing their own sense of time onto the rest of the world, of denying it temporality altogether, of being blind to the multiple times existing simultaneously’.⁹² Equally, and especially in colonial contexts, Europeans have been associated with a linear, evolutionary model of time: a ‘puncturing of cyclical time by the arrow of modernity’,⁹³ a ‘transition narrative’ in which other countries remain in ‘an imagined waiting room of history’, and in which the modern, European idea of history ‘came to non-European peoples ... as somebody’s way of saying “not yet” to somebody else’.⁹⁴ As recent research also underlines, the ‘chronopolitical’ efforts of Europeans to impose standard times and narratives on other peoples have never been

⁹¹ Hartog, *Regimes of historicity*, 106.

⁹² Henrikson and Kulberg, eds., *Time and temporality*, 1–2. See also Adam Barrows, *Time, Literature and Cartography after the Spatial Turn: The Chronometric Imaginary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 6–7.

⁹³ Matthew S. Champion. ‘The History of Temporalities: An Introduction’, *Past and Present*, 243, 1 (2019), 250.

⁹⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 8. See also Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time*, 5–6 and C. Lorenz, ‘The Times they are A-Changin’: On Time, Space and Periodisation’, in Mario Carretero, Stefan Berger and Maria Grever, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2017), 116.

entirely successful. Instead, such efforts have frequently coexisted with, rather than effectively suppressing, alternative means of measuring, recording and experiencing time.⁹⁵

Yet what is perhaps less well studied is that even the Europeans who might – and often justifiably – be accused of judging other nations according to the ‘unitary time of Western modernity’ did not necessarily remain within their stereotypes. This study of French writers in Russia is a case in point. Whatever their views on Russia’s ability to master and continue scientific technological development, these writers acknowledged that, after its Revolution of 1917, Russia represented a possible future for Europe. How, then, could it be located on an evolutionary model that assumed Western European development as the desirable or inevitable conclusion? Was it in the past, present or future on such a model? Or could it be understood only in an alternative regime of historicity – such as cyclical or salvational – despite these being, at least in François Hartog’s theories, sub-dominant in the linear, ‘futurist’ regime of historicity that held sway after the First World War?⁹⁶

The first point to note here is that the writers in this study experienced Russia as uneven in its temporality – which could, of course, be said for any European country, regardless of revolutionary rupture. Some travellers, for example, were struck by social distinctions that they had believed gone with the revolution: Fabre-Luce described Leningrad as seeming, visually, almost pre-revolutionary (though ‘this great mirror is untruthful’),⁹⁷ while Viollis found herself wondering whether the scene on board ship as she travelled down

⁹⁵ Barrows, *Time, Literature and Cartography*, 7, and Giordano Nanni, *The Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine and Resistance in the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 3.

⁹⁶ Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 105. Cf. Henrikson and Kulberg, eds., *Time and Temporality in European Travel Writing*, 5 and 7.

⁹⁷ Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 178.

the Volga ‘would have been different in the time of the tsars’.⁹⁸ Again like other travellers, both Durtain and Duhamel saw the horse-drawn carriage (*izvoztchik*) as an anachronistic relic of the past: no wonder that all the drivers should be counter-revolutionary, observed Durtain, just as all butchers in La Villette were once royalist.⁹⁹ Both, too, described their surreal encounter with the *ancien regime* smile of a Moscow aristocrat, who had sold his entire wardrobe to a cinema company and now donned his former persona – and clothing – only to play in Soviet films (no wonder the aristocratic characters should seem so convincing).¹⁰⁰ One day, perhaps, Russian cities would be all ‘harsh industrial silhouettes, covered with futurist posters’, but for now their appearance was less temporally homogeneous.¹⁰¹

But if Russia seemed ‘miraculously half in the past, and half in the future’,¹⁰² then it was extremely difficult to situate on a European timeline. Travellers sometimes looked down on the ‘medieval’ countryside, like Fabre-Luce during his journey to Tiflis, and discerned the railway line as a thin line of modernity flanked by ‘the middle ages to both left and right’.¹⁰³ But the problem then, as Duhamel sought to articulate, was that the Russian peasantry were both superficially similar to the farmers of the Cévennes (themselves all too close to their medieval predecessors) – and yet also ‘the real masters of Russia’, thrust through their

⁹⁸ Viollis, *Seule en Russie*, 102.

⁹⁹ Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*, 59. Cf. Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*, 158: ‘He would surely survive even the Great Flood.’

¹⁰⁰ Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*, 185; Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*, 140.

¹⁰¹ Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*, 170.

¹⁰² Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*, 54 and 88. Cœuré mentions briefly that travellers sometimes found Russia a ‘journey through time’, but not that they placed it simultaneously in both past and future. (*La Grande Lueur*, 90).

¹⁰³ Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 225.

greatest and possibly final *jacquerie* into a status unknown in Europe.¹⁰⁴ Meanwhile, French communists in Leningrad – like actor and film critic Léon Moussinac, reporting on the tenth anniversary celebrations for *L'Humanité* – described how the films shown alongside *Battleship Potemkin* juxtaposed European and Russian newsreels in a way that made Europe appear to be ‘a great leap into the past [...] a ridiculous old world: small, pitiful, tragic’.¹⁰⁵ For Viollis, Russia was a ‘great laboratory with broken windows’ (a quotation from Paul Morand, to whom Fabre-Luce dedicated his account);¹⁰⁶ for Fabre-Luce, too, the future to which Europe might be heading. Did this mean that the rupture of 1917 had disrupted the linear understanding of history?

The problem was compounded in that, even if Russia were to be located on a linear model of time through the accomplishment of social or cultural change experienced in Europe, its pace and sequence of change were different. Both Fabre-Luce and Durtain expressed the resulting sense of temporal disorientation when writing of artistic and stylistic development. Durtain, for example, noted that commercial posters were both ‘born of our own cubism’ and yet ‘several years ahead of us’;¹⁰⁷ Fabre-Luce observed that post-revolutionary Russia had experienced the symbolism of the 1890s and pre-war futurism as a single stage, before ‘becoming *dada* in 1920, just like us’.¹⁰⁸ This sense that Russia had somehow contrived to ‘miss’ a necessary stage in development rather than simply ‘accelerate’ (as Hartmut Rosa’s ‘theory of modernity’ would suggest) was, of course, even

¹⁰⁴ Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*, 58.

¹⁰⁵ Léon Moussinac, ‘Une Présentation de dix années de révolution à Leningrad’, *L'Humanité*, 12 Nov. 1927.

¹⁰⁶ Viollis, *Seule en Russie*, 15.

¹⁰⁷ Durtain, *L'Autre Europe*, 79.

¹⁰⁸ Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 77.

more widely discussed in social and political terms.¹⁰⁹ French communist Georges Altman was proud to proclaim in his combined review of Durtain, Duhamel, Violis and Fabre-Luce that ‘Russia accomplished two revolutions at the same time: one against the middle ages and the other against modern society. A fact that has disrupted the events that followed as well as the views of observers.’¹¹⁰ Indeed, in a further article reviewing a recent book on Russia by the Armenian writer Armen Ohanian, he reaffirmed that for French observers in particular, the model of a 1789 revolution in which popular militancy in Saint-Antoine ended with the government of the bourgeoisie made the interpretation of the ‘double Revolution’ of 1917 extremely problematic.¹¹¹ And there is certainly evidence for Altman’s claims. Fabre-Luce bitterly criticised the ‘absence’ of a bourgeois revolution, and insisted that one could not ‘simply pass on the torch of intelligence from one class to another’ without serious consequences.¹¹² Duhamel, though in opposition to Fabre-Luce,¹¹³ was likewise concerned by this conflation of political and social stages – noting, in the case of the redistribution of land, that ‘one must advance one step at a time, rather than in a single bound.’¹¹⁴

Moving outwards to the reviews of these travel narratives, it becomes clear that the ‘placing’ of Russia on a temporal model, and the related questions of the shape and motor of historical progress, prompted lively debate. Reviewers such as Marcel Thiébaud in the *Revue*

¹⁰⁹ Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2015), 278.

¹¹⁰ Altman, ‘Les Livres’.

¹¹¹ Georges Altman, ‘Russie d’hier et d’aujourd’hui, vu par Gaston Leroux et Armen Ohanian’, *L’Humanité*, 13 May 1928.

¹¹² Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 67.

¹¹³ Cf. Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 12 and Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*, 68.

¹¹⁴ Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*, 150. Indeed, this fear of over-acceleration would be still stronger in his threatening narrative of America ‘aging – and aging quickly’. See Duhamel, *Scènes de la vie future*, 233.

de Paris highlighted the temporal ambiguity of ‘this great land mass situated outside time, and which seems, to some, to remain in the middle ages, while others see it as offering a vision of the future.’ Despite the material, metallic connection of Russia to Europe through the very tracks of the railway system, travellers and readers alike imagined it separated by an ocean, eliding contemporary journeys into early modern adventures in search of Montaigne’s ‘cannibals’.¹¹⁵ And if Europe and Russia did not belong on a single linear trajectory, then perhaps there were other possible conceptions? Fabre-Luce himself had suggested the possibility of separate but perhaps converging lines for these ‘two Europes’, with Russia becoming more nationalist and Europe more socialist, and Thiébaud’s review suggested the same ‘possible meeting point’: ‘Russia is moving towards capitalism, while we are slowly becoming more socialist.’¹¹⁶

If these two lines of development were converging, then what did that mean for concepts of agency and inevitability as ‘engines’ of motion through time? Viollis did not believe that ‘Russian bolchevism’ could be established in Europe, let alone in France; Duhamel, meanwhile, did not believe in the ‘imminence of communist revolution in France’, yet imagined a more distant future in which, by slow adaptation of attitudes and a generalised, incremental desire for change as irresistible as a rising sea, communism might ‘spread over the entire breadth of the world.’¹¹⁷ Communist reviewers criticised this

¹¹⁵ Thiébaud, ‘Chronique bibliographique’, 475. The reference to Montaigne is implicit in the suggestion that the traveller is ‘fearful of being devoured’.

¹¹⁶ Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 160–1; *L’Europe Nouvelle*, 509 (12 Nov. 1927), Special issue on ‘Russie 1917–27’, 1513. In this extract, Fabre-Luce asks ‘which of the two Europes will force the other to adopt its language’. Thiébaud, ‘Chronique bibliographique’.

¹¹⁷ Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*, 252 and 258; Viollis, *Seule en Russie*, 11. Similarly, a review of Durtain’s account in *L’Humanité* on 5 March 1928 praised his acknowledgement of the ‘irresistible grandeur, like that of some natural force’, belonging to the Revolution.

gradualist approach: they argued that left-wing, relatively sympathetic travellers such as Durtain and Duhamel should, with what François Hartog would later identify as the ‘futurism’ of their times,¹¹⁸ accept the ‘iron reality of communism’, and trust that the sufferings of rapid and radical change would be justified by the new world thus created.¹¹⁹ But there was then the question of individual agency.¹²⁰ Fabre-Luce castigated Duhamel for his fatalistic assumption that communism was an inevitable future – ‘He should have said, and so I’ll say it for him: “Insofar as this depends on me, never!”’¹²¹ And both Fabre-Luce and Duhamel (as well as Durtain, and many of their reviewers) asked the question: ‘if, for example, Lenin had not been a Bolshevik, would bolshevism have triumphed?’¹²²

The final problem with situating Russia on an evolutionary model of European time was the perception of time as cyclical: an earlier regime of historicity in which, according to Hartog, ‘the future might not repeat the past exactly, but it would certainly not surpass it’.¹²³ Such a model received considerable attention in debates around the potential decline and fall of European civilisation in the aftermath of the First World War, such as in Paul Valéry’s *La*

¹¹⁸ Hartog also described futurism as ‘the imperative dimension of the order of time decrees that the viewpoint of the future shall prevail’ (*Regimes of Historicity*, 107).

¹¹⁹ Altman, ‘Les Livres’.

¹²⁰ Viollis claimed that ‘Today, individuals fare better in the atmosphere of sincere collectivism in Russia than in the false individualism of the United States.’ (*Seule en Russie*, 335).

¹²¹ Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 8.

¹²² Marsan, ‘Des Idées et des livres’. Cf. Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 141, Durtain, *L’Autre Europe*, 108 and Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*, 133. Fabre-Luce, however, was less convinced of the potential of other individuals – even powerful officials – within the Soviet system. Of Tchitcherine, he commented, ‘he’s a cog, not an engine’ (56).

¹²³ Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 105.

Crise de l'esprit (1919).¹²⁴ The cyclical character of history, and the specific question of European and Western decline and revival, would be continue to be debated through the 1920s, shaped by the publication of Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 1918–1922), and by Henri Massis's riposte of 1927, *The Defence of the West* (*La Défense de l'Occident*), which urged the rediscovery of Europe's Graeco-Roman and Christian roots in a new crusade for survival.¹²⁵ Meanwhile, the same concerns were also voiced in the popular press. 'Civilisations, like nations, are mortal', insisted *Le Petit Journal*, à propos of a debate between Gaston Riou and Raymond Poincaré over the existence of a European 'nation'. 'And history – which we should not disregard – shows us that they perish if they lose their sense of value, their instinct of self-preservation'.¹²⁶ François Hartog, while arguing for the dominance of a more linear, 'futurist' regime of historicity in the interwar period, nonetheless acknowledged the popular and emotional pull of cyclical alternatives, such as Jacques Bainville's *Histoire de France* (1924), which sought to undermine contemporary notions of progress and to suggest that time did not simply "march on."¹²⁷ What Hartog does not mention – though it is germane to this analysis – was that Jacques Bainville was a royalist, and so had particular reason to oppose a more teleological, republican model.

¹²⁴ Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 13, and Cornick, Hurcombe and Kershaw, *French Political Travel Writing*, Introduction.

¹²⁵ Massis's *La Défense de l'Occident* (Paris: Plon 1927) was widely reviewed, e.g. in *La Nation belge*, *Comœdia*, *Le Petit Journal* and *Action française*. It was also vigorously contested, as described in Cornick, Hurcombe and Kershaw, *Radical Departures*, Introduction, 3.

¹²⁶ 'Aux vérités de la Palisse: Europe, ma patrie', *Le Petit Journal*, 1 Dec. 1928.

¹²⁷ Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 138.

Defence of a ‘cyclical’ model of history, according to which essential national or human characteristics created the conditions for a series of repeating, if not identical, patterns, was not politically neutral. Massis’s *Défense de l’Occident* was resoundingly popular on the right, receiving lavish praise across the nationalist and royalist French press.¹²⁸ Antoine Rédier, founder of the Légion which, together with other movements of right-wing reaction to the short-lived Cartel des Gauches government of 1924–6, held up the threat of communism to galvanise European revival, was explicitly inspired by Massis.¹²⁹ Meanwhile Georges Valois, founder of the Faisceau, had already deployed similar images in the new preface to his ‘philosophy of authority’ *L’Homme qui vient* in 1923, finding in the Frankish king Clovis a model for reviving Christian leadership, and explicitly juxtaposing Lenin, dictator of the ‘Scythian hordes’, against Mussolini, supposed defender of civilisation.¹³⁰ Others on the right depicted repeating cycles of revolution: royalist militant Léon Daudet argued for a Russian cycle of revolution and dictatorship on the model of French precedents, with 1917 as the ‘daughter’ of the Paris Commune of 1871, and ‘legitimate grand-daughter’ of 1789–93 (Marat, meanwhile, was seen to prefigure Lenin).¹³¹ Catholic daily *La Croix* concurred that the Russian revolution repeated French precedents but with still greater devastation, picturing a decline and fall to the pagan times of the ancient world.¹³²

¹²⁸ See, for example, ‘La *Défense de l’Occident*, par Henri Massis’ in *Le Petit Journal*, 4 Oct. 1927, and *Action française* on 1, 6 and 20 May, and 21 Nov. 1927.

¹²⁹ Responding to Massis’s call for defensive action, Rédier imagined this as the task of the current and next generation. See *Action française*, 20 May 1927.

¹³⁰ Georges Valois. *L’Homme qui vient* [1906] (Paris, 1923), Preface, 7–15.

¹³¹ Léon Daudet, ‘Le Communisme et les grands ancêtres’, *Action française*, 31 Aug. 1927.

¹³² ‘Dix Ans de soviétisme: nous voilà ramenés bien plus bas que la Révolution française’, *La Croix*, 9 Nov. 1927.

Though important, the political distinction between competing regimes of historicity was not absolute. Left-wing writers such as Duhamel also reflected on the etymological, ‘revolving’ sense of revolution, specifically on the challenge of stabilising its propensity to keep turning.¹³³ Fabre-Luce, the most conservative of the writers in this case study, imagined converging lines of development rather than a cycle of rise and fall. And there was, moreover, a final challenge to the teleological model that crossed political borders: the question of how Russia might shape the geopolitical balance of power in the immediate and longer-term future, not only in the anticipated clash between United States and the Soviet Union,¹³⁴ but also in the development of Europe’s Asian and African colonies and protectorates, already attuned to the emancipatory potential of combined nationalist and communist ambitions. Both the writers in this case study and those who reviewed their works reflected explicitly on the ways in which Europe had already supplied its colonies with the mental and material tools for its own destruction, preparing pathways for European decline alongside possibilities for progress.¹³⁵ *Action française* reflected on the ways in which Asian colonies might misuse the ‘arms’ or ‘tools’ of their colonisers, ironically almost anticipating the argument of Jean-Paul Sartre’s introduction to Frantz Fanon’s *Damnés de la terre* more

¹³³ ‘That’s the destiny of revolutions: no sooner have they triumphed than they find future revolutions germinating within themselves.’ Duhamel, *Le Voyage de Moscou*, 224. Cf. Viollis, *Seule en Russie*, 14.

¹³⁴ Fabre-Luce’s observation that Russia and the United States were similarly materialist, and that Russia was perhaps ‘an unsuccessful version of America’ provoked lively debate. See *L’Europe Nouvelle*, 509 (12 Nov. 1927).

¹³⁵ Cf. Douglas W. Leonard’s conclusion that French writers, thinkers and administrators gave ‘native Africans the tools to dismantle colonialism’: *Anthropology, Colonial Policy, and the Decline of French Empire in Africa* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 149, and Viollis, *Seule en Russie*, 110.

than thirty years later.¹³⁶ When Soviet incitement was suspected behind a mutiny in Tonkin by Vietnamese nationalist soldiers in February 1930, one of the most deeply felt fears was that those seeking to appropriate European systems were so unskilled in their management that they might drive the engine of history right off the track.¹³⁷

CONCLUSIONS

Communism and its threat or promise of contagion have always produced strong reactions. Those who travelled to Russia in the interwar period, particularly as the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution gave impetus to assess the degree of communist ‘success’, necessarily sought to gauge their own reactions to this political and social experiment, and to respond to those at home who awaited their judgements. And, as previous research has shown, the elaborate ‘simulacrum’ of Russian life presented by their guides might convert, convince, or repel.

Yet, as this article has demonstrated, those who travelled to Russia in this period did not write and think only about the Soviet Union. Instead, both they and their readers and reviewers reflected on Europe in the mirror of Russia: finding in this encounter cause to re-evaluate (and sometimes seriously question) their own assumptions on national borders and

¹³⁶ ‘[The East] seizes the weapons that we hold out with a peaceful smile, and dreams of turning them against us’. Pierre Tuc, ‘Revue de la presse’, *Action française*, 14 July 1927. Cf. Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Maspero, 1961), Preface.

¹³⁷ See René Pinon, ‘Le Drame de Tonkin’, *L’Ouest-éclair, journal républicain du matin*, 16 Feb. 1930, and Martin Thomas, *The French Empire between the Wars: Imperialism, Politics and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 227.

differences, on systems of measurement and even on the shape and direction of time and history. As this case study has emphasised, writers caught up in networks of European political tourism – and in debates over Europe as idea and community – often resisted clear-cut opposition between Europe and Russia. Not only did they juxtapose the finality of crossing the political border of the Soviet Union with the difficulty of locating a geographical moment of transition, but they also emphasised their sense of ‘missed exoticism’ when they located the European ‘gaze’ in Moscow, and raised the question of whether Russia could constitute an ‘other Europe’. Meanwhile, all four writers in this study articulated a sense of difference that was not straightforwardly political, social, or geographical, but instead encapsulated by distinctions between European and Russian relationships to the natural and built environment, and to systems of measuring speed and space. Equally – and here this case study challenges previous assumptions about European ‘spatialisation of time’ and the imposition of Western understandings of temporality and historicity – Russia exerted a disconcerting influence on European conceptions of both time and history. These travel narratives and their reception reveal a persistent inability to situate Russia on a linear, teleological model of time – as if Russia acted like a magnet on a compass, destabilising European conceptions and calibration. Moving between futurist and cyclical regimes of historicity that pictured the shape and direction of time quite differently, European writers on Russia struggled to define its temporal location and significance with their pre-existing ‘systems of measurement’, even calling into question the systems themselves.

There were, indeed, moments when neither linear nor cyclical models of time could quite make sense of the impact of Soviet Russia on the travellers’ individual time or *eigenzeitlichkeit*. On his journey home to France, Alfred Fabre-Luce mused on how the ‘Russian clock, after having slowed down for centuries, has suddenly gone crazy, marking the hours of the distant future, or of some impossible time’, and how he would need to

readjust his watch to the ‘good old time of France’. Yet even this act might not be sufficient to recalibrate to European time. ‘Something’, he concluded, ‘has changed. I’m like that hero from Einstein who returns to his native planet white-haired after a voyage of only ten minutes’.¹³⁸ Here, Fabre-Luce touched on a theme implicit in many of these accounts and reviews, as well as in the oral testimonies of mass meetings such as that at the Cinéma de Grenelle in Paris in 1927: that Russia, being ‘a country outside space, delineated by ideas’,¹³⁹ was somehow also in its own alternative and even ‘eschatological’ temporality,¹⁴⁰ more easily reached through psychological conversion than by travelling across Europe. How this sense of temporality intersected with contrasting models of historicity; how the oral and written accounts of militants such as those who took to the stage at the Cinéma de Grenelle imagined national, international, and European identities, still remains wide open for exploration.

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¹³⁸ Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 264. The impact of Einstein’s theory of relativity on the conceptualisation of time is emphasised by Fryxell in ‘Time and the Modern’, especially 294–5.

¹³⁹ Fabre-Luce, *Russie 1927*, 167.

¹⁴⁰ Henrikson and Kulberg, eds., *Time and Temporality in European Travel Writing*, 5, and Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, 62–3.